THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2015

1. Do you desire God’s will above your own happiness? That question is easy to spin, or to dodge and weave while trying to avoid direct contact with it. To put the question into a statement: Rule No. 1 is to take Mary’s advice – John 2:5. Rule No. 2 is to never forget Rule No. 1. Coran deo.

We are not on a planet adrift in space; we are not a breed of animals among other animals evolving from nothing to something else; we are not God’s people who were created and then told to be good until we die or He returns. We are the created ones who have been chosen to be born again into the Creator; placed in His Family to have an exciting, Father-planned, eternal future. How? The All-mighty Creator has put of Himself into us. He is now our life – the only life we have. He has a daily will and long-term purpose and we are part of it. We now have but a taste of our future happiness but its fullness is ahead. Earth offers us nothing compared to our future, and we can enhance that future by desiring and choosing His will above our temporary brand of happiness – wherever there is conflict between the two.

It is not becoming for a servant to live above his master – Matthew 10:24-25. As we lean toward being rich, great, and honored, consider that our Master was poor, common, and despised. It’s a battle, isn’t it. But already He has made us the righteousness of God in Christ – 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21. Although no one is yet sinlessly perfect in our flesh it is our confidence in His sure grace that moves His spiritual inner accomplishments into our outer flesh. In no way can we be losers, but we are offered the opportunity to become bigger winners.

2. Educators believe that if people are taught correctly they will respond accordingly. Politicians believe that if people are persuaded adequately they will respond accordingly. Judges believe that if they render judgments the people will respond accordingly. The military believes that if they fight the good fight the people will honor them accordingly. Parents believe that if they raise their children right they will have happy and successful children. Preachers believe that the preaching of righteousness results in righteousness. That is accurate thinking in healthy societies.

What we are experiencing in all areas is that our educators, politicians, judges, military, parents, and preachers are having poorer and poorer results. I don’t think we can lay that responsibility upon our leaders, because it is “that time/season” in God’s timeline of history, past-present-future. I will enlarge that in Thought No. 20, which will be a streaming/progressive Thought.

3. Scripture is true, and any theory that is at variance with it is false. That statement requires that we accurately understand both Scripture and those theories. Scripture and observable science must also agree, which happens when we accurately understand both Scripture and those scientific observations. Our Creator’s word and all of His handiwork must agree – He is one and He is truth. Creation has always revealed its Creator, His power, and His character – Romans 1:18-32. The Creator is always progressively revealing His creation and Himself through it. All must agree, as we will see in due time after this earth life. In the meantime, if we cannot reach that agreement, the problem may simply be our lack of adequate facts, or a lack of understanding of available information, or that our minds are susceptible to ignorance, partiality, and division.

4. How deeply and broadly [including legally] have you committed yourself to God’s instructions for living in our current social situation? That is a question saints have had to settle [or have ignored] for 2,000 years, and even before then. That’s not asking if you have perfectly followed His word, but it is a question of your overt, freely made, informed commitment to live His word. For example, when you had a legal disagreement with another Christian, instead of taking the matter to a court of law did you opt for Christian mediation? Or, did you think Paul’s instructions [by the Holy Spirit] to the church in Corinth did not apply to you or to our days? Perhaps, as the Phillips Paraphrase puts it, you did not know any Christians you would trust with the matter. That would be a sad judgment on your life in the church, or perhaps a simple oversight.

Yet, Higuera Hardwoods in Washington State requires customers of its bamboo floors to sign a Christian mediation agreement prior to purchase. Also, Carolina Cabin Rentals, which rents high-end vacation properties in the Blue Ridge Mountains, tells its customers that disputes may be resolved by biblical principles. The same goes for contestants in a fishing tournament in Hawaii.

While apostasy is increasing, true Christianity is arising. The secular media thinks it scandalous that some are voluntarily forgoing their rights to the secular courts by opting for Christian mediation. Our actions show that we are or are not secularists.

5. As the most persecuted religious group in the world, an average of 180 Christians per month are being killed for their faith. Our State Department says that in over 60 countries Christians face persecution from their government or neighbors. In 41 of the worst 50 countries the persecution is by Islamic extremists.

North Korea is the worst country. It has four official state-controlled Christian churches in its capital. Torture, imprisonment and death are punishments for having a Bible or for communicating with Christian outsiders. Severe persecution is going on even in countries having large Christian populations, such as in Columbia, South America. There, political rebels target Christians because many people have left the rebels after coming to Christ. Christians have again become enemies to those who are enemies of the cross. That process is developing more and more in Western countries, namely America and the European Union.

6. It has been said that “Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.” – Mary Shelley [1797-1851], English writer, author of Frankenstein. I have seen many great and sudden changes of human beings, myself included, that were not at all painful, but joyful. Well, not painful to the person changed, but possibly to others who did not appreciate the great and sudden changes from reprobate to born again Christian.

7. “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.” – J. K. Rowling [1965-present], British novelist [Harry Potter series], Anglican Christian. The apostle Paul is a good example to us in his relationship with Peter – Gal. 2:11. True and godly love fits in all of life’s circumstances. Bravery is required in many of them.

8. On the matter of Jesus having accepted and included anyone no matter how bad their sins, He practiced inclusion based on their repentance and transformation. He did not affirm their sin and then include them.

9. We have many ongoing examples of high-level, continual readiness, such as are our firemen. At any time you can visit our local fire stations and observe their readiness. All of them will be about their daily tasks – cleaning up, eating, sleeping, exercising, etc. If you ask them if they are at the ready for a fire their answer will be, “Of course; we are always prepared and ready.” And they are. No matter their necessary involvements in daily life, they are always ready for the next fire. That’s their job. They have prepared for it, they talk about it, they train for it, they work on their weaknesses; in short, their lives are focused on their coming involvement in the next great event. They have purpose and focus.

In Scripture, notice that the faithful were always preparing for the Lord’s next big event in their lives, while being responsible in life before the event. They were focused in faith. Their future guided them daily in such a way that their daily lives accomplished the success promised in their future. They held onto their God-given vision during their down-times. Firemen do the same, no matter how long and routine their down-times.

When the Magi were leaving King Herod and headed for Bethlehem they told him they would report back to him what they found, but were later warned by God in a dream to go home another way. Two thousand years later their promise to King Herod is being fulfilled. A group of 40 Iranian Christians are visiting in Israel this month, bringing precious gifts to Israel just as their ancestors did 2,000 years ago. And, they are reporting “what they found,” that Jesus is the Messiah, the king of Israel. They are traveling throughout Israel telling Jewish Israelis that they used to shout “Death to Israel” but after finding Jesus they now love and pray for Israel. Outstanding; and perhaps more than outstanding, meaning possibly prophetic.

Stay involved in daily life. Focus on and train for the long range vision. That changes life during this down-time. Those who do will not be disappointed.

10. This is a good place and time for us to meditate together on Psalm 2:1-6, because of the worldly activity at hand around each of us: “Why are the nations in an uproar; and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed: (saying) ‘Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury: (saying) ‘But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.’”

Our world systems are failing. That’s to be expected as earth’s labor pangs increase.

11. “Show class, have pride and display character. If you do, winning takes care of itself.” – Bear Bryant [1913-1983], American football player and coach who, despite being a committed Christian, initially opposed religious athletic organizations on his college campus because he thought religious players would lose their aggressiveness. He changed his opinion when Baylor University, a Southern Baptist university, had three elite-level line backers who went on to become preachers.

That paragraph brings up two things: 1) Character comes first, then work or ministry success. 2) Dedication to the Lord does not make one a wimp although lack of insight may make it appear so.

12. What are your stumbling blocks, those things that distract your faith-walk? How about pain and suffering, your private life, mistreatment, self-pity [what a slow death!], a broken heart, and disillusionment. Then there are others’ stumbling blocks, the ones we place in others’ way: religiosity and religious requirements for righteousness or for fellowship and worship with us – Rom. 14:13-19.

13. Of what value are your sufferings? You know that the Lord has present and eternal purpose for them in your life, but only if and when you identify with Jesus and have fellowship with Him during your sufferings. Otherwise, of what value are they? Perhaps then they have the value of human character development, which is still good but not guaranteed.

14. Jesus changed Simon [“Hearer” or “Obeyer”] from being tempestuous and unstable into Peter, Cephas, [“Rock”], a man of solid character that matched his new name. He also changed Saul [“Sepulcher”], from being a narrow minded Pharisee into Paul [“Worker”], the broadminded apostle to the Gentiles.

When you notice your frailties do you also notice your developing corollary strengths, the “other side of the coin?” Be encouraged. And encourage others in their processes. Remind them that we are in the Potter’s hands; that we are His workmanship and that He is active on our behalves.

The tribulations of today work the patience [and other righteousnesses] of tomorrow. Besides, much of our tribulation is in the enduring of our own sins and their consequences. Remind others that Judas’ sin was no worse than Peter’s, but that Peter repented and returned to his faith-walk. Describe for them Peter’s soft heart. All it took to melt his soul was a “touch” from the Master, even if the touch was a look or a word – Luke 5:8; 22:61; John 21:17. That’s heartening to those of us who know we sin.

15. If we are biblically educated and dedicated, we know and revere Abraham, our father in faith. He had everything – great country, a well-settled and prosperous family, a home in the better part of town, wealth, a good marriage – and then an inner voice told him to leave his family and country. He did. He obeyed willingly. He separated himself from everything he knew, including the good things. He followed that god’s instructions and never went back. Although he was a nomad, living in tents the remainder of his life, his was a wise decision. The Lord displays him before us for us to copy.

What if that same voice told you the same thing: Give up your job, cash in and give away your retirement funds, leave your home and possessions, leave your family, perhaps take your immediate family with you and go to another country or state or city? Also, you would have no promise of work and income. For Abraham it was good that there were no psychiatrist available! Likewise, when Jesus heard that voice and obeyed, His family thought He was emotionally disturbed and tried to forcibly bring Him back home – Mark 3:21, 31-35. So also thought the educated who understood things religious – Mark 3:22. On a personal note, when the Lord called me [with my wife and children] from that entire list of goodies to the inner city, my loving parents asked me to see a psychiatrist, and disowned me. I was the only one to whom the Lord had spoken that word of separation, but I knew He had spoken it. it took several years before the Lord restored our relationship with my parents – through that which He did in and through us – Matt. 11:19.

When the Lord, who has His plans and who sees the end from the beginning, calls us to separate from distractions and entanglements of the world or from some particular place and people, He puts very few of us on an isolated mountain top. That separation can be in our hearts and/or geographically. Many times the separation does not seem reasonable. It simply requires simple obedience. The separation may be from drugs, or bad friends, or from the good life into a sacrificial life, or from one place to another. It is the Lord who knows His plans for us. He is the builder of His church, including which stones to place next to whichever other stones. Separation is His business, just as unification is His business.

Separation was and has been from time to time a defining characteristic of the church. Believers were “set apart” in more than religious ways. As a result, there was a distinction between the church and the world about us. When Jesus came He did not come to judge us, but because of who and how He was, those around Him could not help but be judged – John 3:17-21. That is one of the church’s purposes – to not judge society but to be sufficiently separated unto Christ that the world is judged in our day, prior to facing the judgment. If we are living our job adequately, that will happen as we go about loving them.

Today there seems to be little separation and distinction between the two kingdoms. That is tragic, because the world is certainly not getting more righteous. The church is getting less righteous. As a result, we are not instruments of change. When we are little different from the world, we make little difference in the world, except perhaps when we are the best of the best among the worst of the worst.

Why? That type of separation from the world is not possible with the natural mind, even if that mind has been raised in the church [christianized]. What is required is a word of revelation from the Lord. Then that word sticks with us even in our hard times. It is meant for that purpose – for us to obey and then to remember. That is called the walk of faith, in which the Lord does uncommon, beyond-human, miraculous things. Then the things we do are not only “good” but point to Him. He gets the glory.

He wants to reveal Himself to a seeking world, including those who are kicking against the pricks, wanting to destroy Christians. He is worthy of our confident obedience in and through all things.

16. “Hard work without talent is a shame, but talent without hard work is a tragedy.” – Robert Half [1919-2001], American businessman. Putting it another way: “Work without faith is a shame, but faith without works is a tragedy – Heb. 11:6; Jam. 2:17.

17. Brothers and sisters, what is our goal? Is it spiritual or world success? Is it peace? Is it something, anything that is a blessing? Is it a successful ministry? Is it kingdom victory? Pause and meditate on this: Our goal is God Himself.

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” – Phil. 3:7-11

18. Do you ever ask the Lord to be merciful, or loving, or patient, or some other godly thing? As someone who cannot change, how could He be otherwise than merciful, loving and patient? Without my trying to say everything there is to know about prayer, let me say that He will always do the right and loving and wise and perfect thing. Our prayers may move His hand is certain ways, but whatever way His hand moves is perfect – no way to avoid that. We may not appreciate all of His ways but they are all perfect and just and merciful. The more we draw close to Him, the more we see His perfect hand in all things. In the toughest of times our prayers will be more focused on His sure grace for us to be found faithful than on asking Him to alter the direction of things. But, don’t hesitate to ask Him to change the way something seems to be going. It might be a set-up for incorporating you into His plans.

19. Before John the Baptist, the good news of the coming of God’s kingdom on earth was embedded in but only partly hidden in the Law and the Prophets, awaiting its expression. Since John the Baptist’s time it has become more obvious, although if you are not a member of Christ’s kingdom it cannot be seen for what it is. You can see some of its aspects, such as its effects, but you cannot see the kingdom in an understandable, meaningful way. Why? Because it is again hidden, but hidden in a different way. It is now hidden within those who are its members.

Those members know that another kingdom change is on the way. They are eager for it to come. They pray for it to come onto the earth in the yet more obvious way, like it already is in another location – in heaven. That new revelation and form of the kingdom will soon be all over the earth in a fairly typical but righteous governmental order, with its king, Jesus Christ, residing on His throne in Jerusalem, Israel for 1,000 years.

But wait; there is more and it gets even better. That 1,000 year of Christ’s kingdom on earth will end. Following it will be the kingdom we members have been praying for over the past 2,000 years [and the Old Testament insightful believers had prayed for during their millennia]. That presentation of the kingdom will come down from heaven. God, with His throne and heavenly city, will come down upon this planet. The whole earth’s surface and atmosphere will be transformed as God dwells among us. People of all the nations will come into it and serve Him. He will be seen face to face and we will reign forever with Him.

That’s good news. It’s in the Book. What He might have for us after that time has been kept mostly to Himself.

20. Often I have commented on how the world’s societies, even their unbelievers and reprobates, can be christianized to remarkable extents. That describes the church as both leaven among the unconverted and as converter. Earnest Hemingway [1899-1961] is an example of an unconverted reprobate who was partly Christianized. He said, “There is nothing noble to being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.” Such a quality thought leads to the following Thoughts:

1.) Are you in a problem, perhaps are part of the problem, or even the cause of the problem? Look for The Way Of Life in it whether it is temporary or permanent, not just some quick way out of it. Every event of life is orchestrated by the Lord. Some are properly escapable, most are not. Enduring is a common necessity. Enduring in faith, peace, and with the expectation of good results [even if necessarily in the next life] is to pass the test with glorious rewards.

2.) What to do when obsessed or possessed by an evil force such as when having a besetting sin? Example: A brother beset with negativity was convicted by the Holy Spirit. He repented, sought prayer, was delivered and set free. Then what? He [and others of his community of faith] were then responsible for filling him with specifically opposite good stuff [Matthew 12:43-45], resulting in more than only an initial joy and release but also an increasing righteousness and stability. The alternative to immediate filling is greater failure, causing the person to think nothing good had happened in the first attempt [although it had], and the development of an even greater problem.

3.) Can you see goodness in others? In anyone? In everyone? Example: Street and drug gangs have leadership, order, “safety,” unity, family, and fidelity. But those strong points are used for unrighteous purposes. Results: Their strong points are unappreciated by the righteous. A brother, G. N., said: “It’s a mighty thin coin that doesn’t have two sides.” When an unrighteous person sees that something of himself is understood, honored and even trusted, that can be a great tool for change. A light comes on. Hope is stirred in the unrighteous. A bit of honest understanding always helps the development of brotherliness. But don’t lie or flatter. The unrighteousness of man does not work the righteousness of God.

4.) Have you ever kicked against the pricks/goads [a painful prod designed to make us go in the right direction when we don’t want to]? Faithful believers pray for things like patience, love, cars, finances, healing, etc. and then find themselves resisting and praying against God’s process for answering those prayers. There are several reasons why we do not get answers to our prayers, and one of them is that we reject the processes that lead to the answers. Example: If we want to have a baby, the process takes 9 months of patience and increasing disability, then an uncomfortable labor, and then our prayer is at last answered. What a surprise! Life got worse before we got what we had asked for. Remember Exodus 5:1-6:1. When we don’t know or apply God’s ways, we usually don’t endure until the end. Final result: We don’t get that which we asked for. It was simply “another unanswered prayer.”

Examples in Scripture: Rom. 5:1-5 [exult in the process]; Luke 21:19 [“By your steadfastness and patient endurance you shall win the true life for your souls.”]; Acts 26:1-19 [Paul’s testimony, in which he needed a remarkable conversion before he could receive the answer to his earnest prayers.]. Nancy and I spend more time praying for others and ourselves to be found faithful in God’s processes than we pray for changes in our and others situations. About the situations, often we simply tack on: “Lord, you know that we would enjoy a change in our situation, but don’t interrupt the process before we get out of it what we should.” God is always in the process, so don’t disrupt it. Compare the farmer who plows the hard ground, plants seed, waters during dry months, and gathers the harvest. Not many farmers plow under the growing crop before it has come to harvest time; they know better than to do that. Harvest time will come in its time.

5.) What of your life shows to those around you that you are habitually submitted to God’s will? How about your patience? Patience is God’s grace working in us to endure with calmness and peace, and it is the evidence of having already persisted in enduring. As patience becomes a part of our character it publicly parades before God’s chosen ones as a ready submission to God’s will. It shows as bearing-long with those who greatly transgress against us and God, while we expect good results for them and us.

6.) Submission to God’s will also requires an ease of repentance, an acceptance of unpleasant situations, and rejection of the idea that the Lord owes us something better [especially if “I have been good” and “He loves me”]. An acceptance of life’s situations, with the expectation of God’s results in His time, shows our faithfulness to the Promise Giver. Example: 1) The Egyptian army was traveling through Israel to engage the Babylonian army north of Israel. That was no small problem for Israel because armies lived off of the countryside, taking whatever they wanted. Jehovah, through His prophet, told Israel’s king to stand aside, submit to the situation, and let Egypt pass, but the king decided to fight [Israel being God’s people! who possessed the promises!] . So, they fought Egypt and God’s people lost. Their mistake: Knowing what God could do, and trying to believe Him into doing it. But the message had been: “Submit to Egypt, don’t fight them.” Our message: When we pick and cling to some of God’s promises instead of obeying Him, we are on our own.

As a result of Israel having weakened Egypt’s army, Babylon defeated Egypt. A few years later Babylon came against Israel. Then God’s word to Israel was for His people to yield to Babylon, not fight them. It was a difficult decision for Israel because, again, they were God’s people! and had God and His promises on their side! But they accepted God’s word through the prophet and opened Jerusalem’s gates. The results were not too bad, except to the super-religious. An annual tribute was levied against Israel and some of the best [Daniel, et. al.] were taken to Babylon, educated, and given leadership positions in the Babylonian bureaucracy.

After several years the super-religious convinced the king to stop paying tribute. After all, Israel was God’s people! and all they needed to do was trust Him and His word! That brought the Babylonian army back to Jerusalem, where it laid siege. Again God’s word through the prophet was to yield, not fight. It took only three months for Israel to become convinced of the error of their ways and opened their gates. This time Babylon took many captives, installed a new king, and increased the annual tribute.

Again, in several years, the super-religious again convinced the king to stop paying tribute. [Same reasons] Again Babylon returned and laid siege to Jerusalem. After 15 months Babylon broke through the gates. The slaughter was great, Jerusalem and God’s temple were destroyed, and the survivors were taken as slaves to Babylon. It looked like the end for God’s people. During those years of slavery God’s prophets told His people to settle down, marry, have families, be good slaves, and at the right time their God would bring them back to Jerusalem. Most obeyed. In 70 years they were offered their freedom, and a small part of them did return to Jerusalem.

Our message? It is obvious, but the super-religious cannot hear it. Submit to your situation. Do not pick and claim promises like at a smorgasbord. There are times and seasons, some of which are due to our faithfulness and unfaithfulness, our abiding and our not-abiding. He is always faithful, but will not have his arm twisted by our desires and claims. What He can do is often not be what He will do. We are precious to Him, but He has His times and ways. He is Lord. It is good for us to get into step with Him.

7.) What is God doing 1) in your soul, 2) in the closeness of your family and friends, 3) in your workplace contacts, 4) in your neighborhood, city and county, 5) in your state, 6) in your nation, and 7) in the world? We are those who have Christ’s mind [1 Cor. 2:16 – meaning biblically informed, Holy Spirit-illuminated, corporate human minds, infallible when we are united and desire only our Father’s will], understanding [Ps. 119:104; John 3:9-10], and insight [“those who have ears to hear will hear”]. We have been made children of the Light so it is not necessary to walk in darkness – 1 John 1:5-7. Observe that which is going on within and around us, learn to go with much of the flow [not with the sin] so as not to resist that which God is processing. Change that which is now time to be changed, yield to other situations. That’s what Jesus did. He did not do all that He could have done, only that which He should have done.

8.) Now, about the soon-coming end of things [only of those things as we have known them] meaning the approach of Jesus’ promised end times: Matthew 24:3-4; 29-31; Matthew 24:32-44. We will not know the day or hour but we are told that we should know the season. Live expectantly. Don’t fall for the idea that “things have never changed, and that therefore we can be sure they will never change.” That’s the best that an atheist can do, and too many believers settle for that kind of atheistic thinking. Remember the tremendous changes of history: Adam’s expulsion from the garden, Noah’s flood although it had never previously rained, decline of the human life span from almost 1,000 years to around 100 years, tower of Babel re: miraculously different languages, Jesus’ first coming in a partially concealed way, insertion of the church contrary to learned Jewish scholars’ understanding, believers born again into God’s family contrary to human understanding, Holy Spirit anointing like Jesus’ anointing available to every believer, THEN the coming rapture for removal of the saints before the outpouring of God’s wrath, the tribulation for conversion of unbelieving Jews, the millennial reign of God’s Son Jesus on this very earth, and finally God with His throne and His city coming from heaven onto our remade earth’s surface and atmosphere for Him to dwell among us forever. All of those are real and very basic changes! So, there have been and will be many basic changes and many “delays.” Ignore the current delay, don’t get sedated by our daily God-given routines, but expect your removal before God’s wrath is poured out on the world, work for and expect your rewards because they are part of God’s plans for you, seek to be an overcomer [meaning allow the Holy Spirit to develop the character of Jesus in you and do the works of Christ through you], don’t have or submit to two masters [do all as unto the Lord, including properly relating to the world], and expect tribulations before the rapture and the Great Tribulation. Look up! We will not be disappointed and there is no need to be surprised.

21. “You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.” – William Faulkner [1897-1962], moderately christianized American writer, Nobel Prize laureate, Pulitzer Prize winner. He was right.

22. The question is asked, “Why the current increase in Muslim conversions to Christianity compared to the very small numbers in the past?” The following answers have been given: 1) Progressive development of communications from radio to satellite to internet, 2) an increase in the number of dreams and visions of Jesus by Muslims, 3) improved missionary ministry strategies, 4) advances in language translation methods, and 5) increased migration, which is placing Muslims into contact with the church, Bibles, christianized societies and Christians. Basic to all reasons is that this is God’s season for Muslims. He who is God is love, Jesus is the full revelation of that love, and those who are Christians are revealing God’s love. He is revealing Himself.

23. Change is sometimes welcomed, sometimes shunned, usually depending upon whom it benefits and whom it threatens. In the kingdom of this world those in power tend to resist change and those without power desire change – making the process and results of change even more traumatic and divisive. That includes the kingdom of this world as found on the church roles and in its leadership. Servants of the King on any human level seek both stability and change, if they are righteous and obedient. Mostly that is defined as a return to biblical standards as applied by the Holy Spirit.

24. A person living and moving by faith has all of the reason necessary for supernatural intervention and natural application. Reason’s foundation is imagination. Imagination is either imaginary [unsecured and “way out”] or imaginative [sufficiently related to logic so as to be creative]. The incarnation, justification, and sanctification are not imaginary, but they are imaginative and therefore can become reasonable, leading to faith. Yet, the working of the Holy Spirit is required in order to give Life to the process and its result.

25. “Prophet” is a good word; so is “profit.” Businesses succeed when they meet customers’ needs and make a profit. Even if a business has good stuff, if it does not cater to its customers’ needs and also make a profit, it fails. Prophets and profits are essential. A church without a prophet and a business without a profit will fail, even if the doors somehow manage to stay open.

26. King Solomon became considerably worn out and twisted in his old age, but he started out well. His theme [to me] was that life is worthless if not centered on Jehovah. He said that even [others’] deaths have their value. In Ecclesiastes 7:1-6 he pointed out that funeral services are opportunities. In my experience, Baptists know that very well and seize the occasion. Funeral gatherings and sermons become times of serious and productive evangelism.

Solomon said funerals cause us to reevaluate life and to take a serious, personal look at it. All are going to die and then face “whatever is next.” “Whatever is next” is imagined by everyone, but only the Bible-formed imaginations of Christ’s followers are accurate. Solomon said that our sanctification is the result of our troubles, so our troubles are valuable and we should use them with purpose. Rebukes from a wise person are especially valuable, but are often junked because we prefer the praises of fools. Because of the inevitability of death and of that which follows we should focus on long range, eternal priorities.

27. If the church is to have a chance for revival, it certainly depends on the Lord. What might be some of the first signs that the Lord of the church is reviving His church? How about changes in the preachers of His word. Charming preachers have not gotten it done. Those who “take over” have not gotten it done. The dutiful, diligent leader who does everything “right” has not gotten it done. The preachers who make Christianity acceptable to everyone have not gotten it done. But the preacher who is ready to stand in opposition to those presentations of Jesus’ gospel, who knows Jesus and regularly hears from Him – that man will stand in flat contradiction to all of the flesh’s goodness. In the name of the Lord He will denounce the past and earn Jesus’ enemies. That man will be a nobody, headed nowhere, and have nothing going for him except that he is God’s man. He will be ready to lay all down for his Lord. The Lord will be his life and his reward. He will not be a spiritual John Wayne. [God bless John Wayne!]

28. Occasionally, in my medical practice, the Lord would tell me the medical route to explore or the key to a problem or even a hidden diagnosis for a patient, even when I had a repertoire of medical knowledge to rely upon. I learned to ask Him for “the key” to the patient’s soul so that something eternal could be accomplished, not only the physical. Sometimes that key was the central problem to a group of issues; a logjam was opened. When He did that the results were remarkable. With my patient’s log in the eye removed, Light would shine in an area of darkness, Satan’s platform of control would be evicted, and consequences spiritual, mental and physical followed.

Although I am no longer in active medical practice, the Lord is still doing those timely, accurate things in counseling and common conversation, and in other doctors’ practices. Things that are concealed in the corners or remote and dark areas of our lives need God’s Light. It is striking what can happen when only one “small” dark area is enlightened. Then basics like truth, repentance, forgiveness, and the cross are more readily received.

29. This Thought is about preparedness of the type and magnitude thought to be helpful to the saints during the times of woe before Christians are raptured – preceding the seven year tribulation. Because some faithful ones consider temporal preparations to be evidence of unbelief, we will start with some simple questions.

Do you have a spare tire in your car, and know how to use it? Why? I hope your answer is “yes” on both accounts.

Do you have money saved for your rainy day, and wish you had more? Why? Ibidem.

Do you have more than one suit of clothing? Why? Ibidem.

Do you have car or house insurance? Why? Ibidem.

All of that has to do with being prepared, which is good. The motivation to prepare and the ability to be prepared are filled with grace and righteousness, unless otherwise indicated. It need have nothing to do with anxiety, unfaithfulness, or hoarding, all of which would be unrighteous.

Why be prepared? Reason: Self and others’ needs; plus God’s will. Let’s keep our reasons righteous.

What are our resources for living in our present temporary and perishing situation? Answer: Self [including savings and other assets], family, friends and neighbors, governments, and NGOs. Where is the Lord in that list? Answer: Everywhere. How will your resources be mobilized? Answer: By stimulating one another’s love. Caution: Don’t stimulate others’ love by being unlovable [because you stand to lose].

Next, since we are dealing with Bible believers’ preparation for the pre-tribulation woes: There is a belief that there is no rapture, no tribulation, no second coming of Jesus – basically that there will be no end times changes and perhaps no end times. Let’s deal with the question of whether things will ever basically change. What are some of the major changes that have already come upon the earth? Short list answer: Adam’s and Eve’s chastisements and expulsion from the garden into the field, Noah’s flood even though it had never before even rained, diminished life span from almost 1,000 years to around 100 years, sudden multiple languages from only one language, causing tremendous social upheaval at the tower of Babel, the Messiah’s first coming to His people in a greatly concealed way, insertion of the church into God’s clearly stated plan for Israel, and the transformation of selected humans into spiritual beings as children of God by being born again. Yet to come are the pre-wrath taking home of those spiritual humans who will be then alive on earth, the wrath of the tribulation for conversion of the Jews, the 1,000 year reign of Jesus on this earth, and finally [?] God with His throne and His city coming down from heaven onto our remade earth’s surface and atmosphere to thereafter dwell among us forever. So, why should we think things as they now are will never change?

How does your expectancy of Jesus’ coming in the air to gather the believers affect your life? Are you “hot,” “warm,” or “cold?” “Warm” means “informed but unenthusiastic.” Scripture tells us that those “warm” will be deceived. See 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Rev. 3: 15-17. Do we talk about the times and situations of our removal and do nothing? – Prov. 26:13.

My approach to the church’s removal is “be expectant, eager, and prepared but don’t be presumptive and silly.” 1) Being expectant means genuinely anticipating according to Scripture guidance, awareness of current international events and their meanings, and having some degree of Holy Spirit sensitivity. 2) Eagerness indicates readiness for our judgment [in the heavens before coming back with Him at His return onto the earth] moving onward in the meantime, and possibly includes some escapism. 3) Being prepared means being active in our part of the Master’s vineyard and living close to the Lord personally and corporately. It may also mean various forms of temporal preparedness, which may be more than our daily practice of preparedness. 4) Being presumptive is such as setting the day and time of Jesus’ return. Being aware of the seasons of God’s work is not presumptive. 5) Silliness has to do with spiritual weirdnesses like withdrawal from society to hide out, being less intense in ministry, lessening Christian fellowship in order to focus on one’s own preparation, and chasing after false Jesuses.

So let us study Matthew chapters 24 and 25 to see what preparation for Jesus’ return is. Those 2 chapters were spoken to the Jews and deal with the rapture and His second coming. In those 2 chapters we Gentiles are allowed to overhear and benefit from Jesus’ conversation with the Jews. We Gentiles want to be the focus of these words, but we are not. Jesus’ focus was entirely on the Jews. We are allowed to overhear their discussion and should benefit from what we hear.

Much of what we read will have to do with chaos, danger, and disasters – some types of which have gone on for millennia and others that have never before happened. Many of these signs have been tasted and some fulfilled, but at a future time the more intense [by degree and frequency] will be overpowering to the flesh. After the rapture and before His second coming, two-thirds of earth’s population will be killed; all would die if those days were not stopped. Now to Matthew.

24:1-14 – Some early signs are that many will be misled [drifting lives, ungrounded souls, social disjoints], there will be wars and rumors of wars, frightening things, famines, earthquakes [all those are birth pangs], Jews killed and hated by all nations, many Jews fall away and hate and betray one another, false prophets mislead them, lawlessness, cold love, endurance needed, gospel will be spread over all the world.

24:15-28 – Other signs [some following 1-14 and some interwoven] are that Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple will suffer trials that threaten the Jews’ existence [a problem for God’s people since the garden]. The Jews will expect their Messiah and some will chase after false Messiahs and false prophets. Here Jesus warned them that when He comes it will be suddenly, with no time to chase about. That is an important sign so should prevent our chasing around after false messiahs.

24:29-31 – When the great and terrible tribulation is ended, when all of His creation has been shaken, He will immediately return onto the earth and all will see Him in the sky. At that time He will finish gathering the Jews to Israel.

24:32-41 – Again an interwoven picture, this time of the rapture. Israel will have been re-gathered, be showing life [but not yet be fruitful, which is reserved for them in the millennium]. Then will come His taking away of some Jews [and many Gentiles] while leaving others as in the days of Noah – the rapture.

24:42-51 – General instructions for the Jews to be prepared for His second coming. Servants/slaves are to be alert and ready, which again tells us that He is talking to the Jews, not to His bride the church. His bride will reign with Him; the Jews will be put in charge of His household [ambassadors in the world].

25:1-13 – Of the 10 virgins, 5 had oil for their lamps [Holy Spirit enlightening their souls] and 5 had no oil [no Holy Spirit to enlighten them]. All were expecting the Messiah – non-Jesus believers for His first coming and Jesus believers for their rapture. Many faithful, non-Messianic Jews are rightly expectant of their Messiah’s soon coming. They all were in a state of sleep or rest but the 5 with oil were prepared for departingwith Him. The 5 without oil had to pay the price [which the other 5 had already paid]. The price of being a Messianic Jew is great among the Jews. The wedding and feast occur in heaven during the earth’s 7 year tribulation, between the rapture and the second coming.

25:14-30 – We might imagine [being imaginative, not imaginary] here that one talent indicates they were God’s earthly people [simply Jews], and that 2 talents indicate those were faithful earthly Jews, and that the 5 talents indicate that they were born again faithful Jews. The long journey at this time has been for 2,000 years.

25:31-46 – Now into the millennium during Jesus’ reign on His throne in Jerusalem. He will judge the nations according to how they treated the Jews.

So, Jesus told the Jews and us to be informed so we would not be deceived by deceivers, not frightened by frightening events, not fall away during times of falling away, not be betrayers of others in times of great betrayals, not hate when hated, not become lawless when others’ love becomes cold, and not chase after “christs” because He will come suddenly to everyone. That includes at the Rapture and at His second coming. The rapture will occur in a revealed, fairly general “season” much like we are in today. The second coming will be more specifically heralded in the time frame of “days.” In the meantime, we are seeing the season of the fig tree. Israel is coming to life, becoming a nation in “one day,” producing leaves, and about to bear fruit. But its fruit will not be borne until the millennial reign of Christ.

The parable of the 10 virgins is to the Jews about being watchful and prepared, not about anyone going to heaven or hell. All 10 were expecting Jesus’ [some His first, some His second] coming and had oil and wicks that needed trimming if they were to burn brighter. The wicks of Israel’s [and the listening church’s] oil lamps are our souls; trimming them is self-examination; the oil is the anointing fire of the Holy Spirit. This parable tells us that faithful Jews [Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews] will be expecting their Messiah but that some will not be alert to His imminent coming. The foolish ones were out of oil, had a sudden need for it, and turned to the believers for it. They were turned away, being told that they had to pay for it at the Source, as the others had. While the foolish ones were getting their oil they missed the rapture [the wedding feast is in heaven during the 7-year tribulation]. The church is currently overhearing that parable and should benefit from it.

Outlining “Preparedness:”

Why do you want to be prepared? There are various good reasons, such as for your sake, for others’ sakes, and for Jesus’ sake. Definitely I want to avoid a formula for preparedness, but apparent necessities are:

1. Born again -- Entering into the family of God, a miraculous and forever act of our heavenly Father brought about by His putting of Himself within us. But preparedness for His coming is beyond being simply [but wonderfully] born again or “saved.”

2. Learning to be who we are as sons of God; living full-time in our God-granted heavenly identity.

3. Becoming serious about developing our sonship [character and service] by taking up our own crosses daily and following Jesus.

4. Living within the above three things produces family-mindedness. God the Son came as Spirit into a common human body to form a spiritualized body of other humans into being Him and doing His deeds. Together we have a charter or commission to be and act as Him. Any lack of our unity restricts His body. That body is the worldwide church from the day of Pentecost to the coming rapture. Our individual behavior accurately reflects our abiding in Him; as also our corporate behavior in His body accurately reflects our abiding in Him. The church is also a loving and testy tool of the Holy Spirit to strengthen our abiding in Him.

5. Readiness does not come about by focusing on the church. Readiness comes about by abiding in Jesus. [Defined as loving the Lord with all that we are and have, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.]

6. Readiness does not come about by focusing on self and temporal readiness. Readiness comes about by abiding in Jesus, out of which will come appropriate, timely readiness in the natural realm.

7. Readiness does not come about by being informed about Bible prophecies and matching them with current events. To be ready in that area we must act upon accurate information and act appropriately. Remember Noah’s ark and flood, and the first Passover in Egypt, both being individual and group actions, stemming from accurate information, then confidence in that information, then patience and endurance as God’s timing was processing, then accurate action on the part of God’s faithful, and then God’s promised results.

8. After all of the above has been said, all of our various understandings of the end times may be wrong! Thank the Lord that the main and basic preparation is of our heart [individually] and our hearts [corporately]. Therefore we can be prepared for anything and everything, while perhaps taking our temporal lumps. If that is effective in our lives, we do not fear because we are prepared in God’s love. Psalm 2:all – Install Jesus in your heart, mind and lifestyle and you will have refuge in Him during times of difficulty, which for our present discussion means the time of pre-rapture troubles spoken of by Jesus and in which we may now be living or approaching.

Honestly, I think we are but little prepared for that which is now immediately ahead. I wonder if we sense the need and the urgency to specialize in 1) attending to our faith in the Lord and in one another during these current God-customized preparatory situations of our lives, 2) learning about the “blessed hope” and how to be grasped by it [meaning set our sights on it so that our lives will be continually modified by it] and 3) perfecting our love for God and man so that it becomes a gracious habit in which we enjoy what and whom He is interested in. The hard times themselves will need to do much of our shaping, but that is the story of humanity -- we learn the essentials after the war has already started. When I think about it in this case, I tremble.

Alexander Cruden’s [1699-1770] definition of Christian hope: “A firm expectation of all promised good things, so far as they may be for God’s glory and our good, but especially of eternal salvation and happiness in heaven, where we shall be conformed to the Son of God; which hope is founded on the grace, blood, righteousness, and intercession of Christ, and the earnest of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and the unchangeable truth and almighty power of God, which always second his word.”

Summary: All is summed up in John’s last messages to the saints around him: “Little children, love one another.” Few of us have had the opportunity to express much of that love as will be needed in the days ahead as the kingdom labors to be born into this world.